

Student-Centered Learning in the Art Museum: The Benefits of Object-Based Teaching

The National Gallery's tours for Pre-kindergarten–12 immerse students in a uniquely rich and varied learning environment that features one of the country's finest collections of Western art, spanning the 1300s to the present.

Museum tours, tailored to specific grade levels, offer students the opportunity to develop multidisciplinary skills and knowledge of content to complement and augment their academic studies. Students connect fine art with disciplines such as studio art, history, social studies, and language arts in a setting that supports a variety of learning styles. Below are some of the educational benefits teachers cite for bringing students to the museum.

- **Language development and critical-thinking skills:** As students examine objects and discuss them with educators and peers, they build vocabulary as well as skills in reasoning and debate.
- **Seeing original art:** Looking at a reproduction is not the same as coming face-to-face with an original work by Rembrandt van Rijn—the ultimate primary source. The art museum offers an extraordinary arena not only for aesthetic experience, discovery, wonder, and inspiration, but also for practical discussions of the various tools and techniques of making art.
- **Object-based learning:** Many students are concrete learners and are motivated when educational resources are tangible and physical. Others are more engaged when stimulated emotionally or aesthetically. The art museum is an ideal alternative learning environment for all learners.
- **Multidimensional knowledge:** Museum discussions about art often lead students to see that there is seldom one definitive answer to a problem and that works of art can possess multiple levels of meaning, each equally valid. In this respect, museum learning emulates the complexities of real life.
- **Student-centered learning:** Inquiry-based programs allow educators to adapt their teaching to students' interests, observations, and questions. Student-centered museum programs can spark the imagination and capitalize on students' intrinsic curiosity about newly discovered treasures and the museum environment itself.
- **Historical and global awareness:** Museums with wide-ranging collections can offer students the opportunity to journey back in time and across cultural boundaries. Museum collections can foster powerful discussions about what societies have valued and preserved over time.
- **Lifelong learning and cultural stewardship:** Museum programs foster awareness that learning can occur in informal, nonclassroom environments. Studies show that museum visitation habits and cultural interests are formed during childhood.